

Meet CFUS



Joseph C. (Joe) Hibbitt
Principal, President
Los Angeles, California



Manny Mangahas
Principal, VP—East Coast Operations
Clifton, Virginia (Washington DC)



Burnie Reed
Principal, VP—Midwest Operations
Dallas, Texas

CFUS Update!

Industry: Medical/eCommerce

Service: Project Management

Managed programming efforts to facilitate to conversion from their prototype beta system to a global production launch.

Industry: Defense

Service: IT Strategy Consulting

Analyzed and created functional and technical processes and procedures. Drafted a long term business strategy. Delivered a technology strategy to achieve the the long term business goals.

Onshoring, Not Offshoring

At the one extreme we have the protectionists, who want to erect barriers to offshoring. Some of them even want to outlaw the practice. At the other extreme are the libertarian free-traders, who believe in open borders and the unimpeded flow of goods and services around the globe.

Most of us are somewhere in the middle – we generally agree that free trade is a good thing, and that governments should not be telling us to run our lives. We believe that we should be able to run our lives, and our businesses, as we see fit.

But we also believe that it is a Good Thing to keep jobs in the country, and to keep skills and money close to home. For some of us, the whole issue is very confusing, because our desire for freedom and our economic and emotional nationalism are pulling in opposite directions.

Both sides of the debate have resorted to emotive arguments, but the most emotive by far are coming from the opponents of offshoring. Their arguments are generally those of protectionists

down the ages, based on the assumption that trade, and globalisation, is a zero sum game. They continue with this belief despite the lessons of history and mountains of evidence to the contrary. In virtually every case, free trade has brought more benefits to more people than protectionism.

But their arguments are superficially attractive, particularly if you have lost your job to a foreigner. The “protection” of ICT jobs has become a hot button in the US presidential election, and has begun to figure as an issue in Australia, the UK and in many other developed countries. It is not a pretty sight.

Fortunately, some voices of reason are starting to be heard. They are not protectionist voices, but nor are they the arguments of the pro-trade economic rationalists. We are starting to hear from what we might call the intelligent middle, which rightly sees globalisation as inevitable, but which is looking for ways to use it to local advantage. In the Australian context, this means looking at this country’s competitive advantages and exploiting them.

The largest of the ICT analyst groups, Gartner, has established a large practice advising users and vendors on the pros and cons of outsourcing in general, and offshoring in particular. “Whether you outsource locally or internationally, it is not something you should do for cost reasons,” says Gartner vice president Rolf Jester. “Outsourcing should be about service, not price.

“People are always looking for ways to control costs and save on capital investments, but that is not the same as lower costs,” says Jester. “If your primary motive in outsourcing is to save money, you are on a death spiral. You may well save money, but you should be doing it because it fits with your strategic goals. Outsourcing should be an enabler of your business strategy.”

That is even more true of outsourcing offshore, he says. “A lot of the current debate about offshoring in Australia is putting the cart before the horse. They are looking solely at one aspect of costs, and forgetting that Australia has a large range of competitive advantages that

India and China and other popular offshoring destinations simply don't have."

Jester says Australia's advantages include our lifestyle, our legal system – "if you have a problem, you can actually sue someone in this country", our educational level and skills base, many relative cost efficiencies, and the linguistic diversity of Australia's multicultural society.

"It's not widely realised that a lot of multinational companies use Australia as an offshore destination for Asia and other countries," Jester explains. "Oracle has a big support centre in Melbourne that services all of Australia. IBM has one on the Gold Coast that supports Japan, in Japanese. Australian ICT innovators are in a unique position to tap into the global value chain, just as the Indians have done."

The Kiwis have woken up to this, says Jester. "At Gartner's next offshoring conference in London, the New Zealand Government has taken a stand promoting NZ as an offshoring destination. Australia could do the same, if

people would look beyond their immediate concerns to the larger opportunities out there."

Someone who has done just that is Paul Matthews, a well-known Australian ICT entrepreneur. Matthews has recently brokered a deal with a large US software house where Australian ICT professionals will develop and maintain development projects for clients in the USA. The bottom line costs per hour are higher than in India, but lower than in North America.

"But it is not primarily about cost," says Matthews, echoing Rolf Jester's comments. "My client believes in Australia, and has had very good experiences with its staff in its Australian offices. They can solve many of their problems in Australia, but not in the rest of the world. They looked at Israel and India, but they had major concerns about political stability. They were also fed up with getting impressive resumes from people in those countries who in practice just did not have the skills required."

Matthews believes that too many Australian companies are overlooking Australia's skills base and the many other advantages to keeping IT skills onshore. "Often Australian software development companies aren't even being given the opportunity of quoting for jobs, because so many people have these ideas that things are cheaper and easier offshore. When you factor in all the issues, they are not. The project management costs alone, if properly accounted for, can more than eat up any savings afforded by cheap offshore programmers."

Industry bodies like the ACS and the AIIA are moving towards this view. Both want jobs to stay in Australia, but neither is in favour of a legislative approach, which will ultimately strangle innovation and entrepreneurship. The ACS is developing guidelines for "responsible" offshoring, and the AIIA's Rob Durie has called for a response based on Australia's advantages.

That is the way the debate should be headed. Protectionism ultimately helps nobody.

Five Usability Challenges of Web-Based Applications

Recently, networking site Facebook.com introduced a new feature the designers thought users would love. Instead of forcing users to check up on every friend's Facebook pages constantly to see any change in the friend's status, they created a "mini feed" which instantly displayed all changes on their own Facebook page. The designers thought users would embrace the new feature, seeing it as a real strength of the site.

Instead, users rejected the mini feed. They didn't like how it was propagating information they perceived to be personal across the entire user base, seeing the feature as an invasion of their online privacy. Within 24 hours of the feature's introduction, more than 750,000 of the eight million users had signed online petitions, putting Facebook's new feature squarely on the front page of both the

New York Times and the Wall Street Journal.

(It's interesting to note Facebook users found out about the petition by seeing other people sign it in their own mini feed display. The feature itself contributed to the protest's impressive speed and strength.)

Having 10% of your users reject and protest a new feature within 24 hours is an issue unique to web-based applications. If users don't like a feature in their desktop word processor, they may complain and some may editorialize, but you wouldn't see such an immediate and passionate response.

Web-based applications present s we don't often see in other types of designs. These challenges need to be top-of-mind as the

design team creates, updates, and maintains the application.

#1: Scalability

A contributor to Facebook's mini-feed debacle was the scale of their design. Facebook, making any change to their site, instantly affects eight million people. If even one percent has issues with the change, that's 80,000 affected users.

Being a social networking site compounded Facebook's issue. Users connect to other users, some users having dozens or even hundreds of connections. Those users with many connections instantly saw a very populated mini feed and realized their previously subtle interactions on their page were now broadcast to each connection.

Scale issues show up in a myriad of ways. Netflix, the online movie store, allows users to place movies they want to see into their queues. Managing a queue with 10 movies is quite simple. However, some users have hundreds of movies in their queue. Do they chunk the display of the queue into groups of 10 or 20? Do they display them all at once? How do they effectively give users control over the movies arrival order?

Many e-commerce sites give users the option of storing their shipping and billing information. What happens when users have multiple payment methods (such as a work credit card and a home credit card) or have multiple shipping addresses? For some gift sites, such as Proflowers.com, users could have many people they wish to send flowers to on a regular basis. That implies building sophisticated address book functionality into their order processing application.

Designers need to take both the scale of the user base and the scale of the data into account when thinking about how to design their web-based applications effectively.

#2: Visual Design

Web apps live in this strange world, half application, half web site. Something as theoretically simple as making a command look like a command becomes difficult quickly. Do you make it a button? Do you make it a link?

Take the common practice of supplying an "Advanced Search" capability alongside the standard search. A typical implementation will have a text box (for entering the query), a "Search" function (for the standard search), and an "Advanced Search" function. Should the designers make both functions into buttons? Will that confuse the user? If they make "Advanced Search" a link, will users understand it's an alternative command (versus an explanation or some other site feature)?

Sometimes, in web application design, it feels like every pixel matters. This isn't just

a question about the application's aesthetics. Visual design can have a huge impact on how the application communicates its use.

A user, doing their taxes or booking an airline reservation, doesn't want to think about the mechanics of interpreting the application's screen. They want to think about their deductions or their vacation destination.

Yet, if the visual design isn't clear and concise, the design takes the user's focus away from what they wish to think about and forces them to try to guess what the designers were trying to tell them.

At Lahey.org/appointments, patients can make new appointments or reschedule existing appointments with the Lahey Clinic's hundreds of doctors. The application helps keep costs down by reducing the calls coming into the clinic's offices. The app asks existing patients to enter their Lahey Clinic Number, an 8-digit number often starting with the letter "L" (such as "L1234567").

Yet, the appointment scheduling application doesn't want users to enter the "L". They only want the seven numeric digits. In informal testing, we found patients, not realizing they needed to enter only the numeric digits, would receive an obscure error message and become flustered, often resulting in having to call the clinic's offices for help.

The designers could choose one of several alternative visual treatments to solve this problem. For example, they could start the field with an "L" or they could provide an example for users to follow. Many visual design issues, like this one, are simple to fix with a little creativity and experimentation.

Visual design problems affect an application's success in a variety of ways. In the mildest form, they slow users down and distract them from their task. In the worst cases, they confuse users to the point of giving up or needing assistance. If the application is in the organization's revenue stream or helps reduce costs, we've seen visual design issues

can dramatically affect the bottom line.

#3: Comprehension

Potential investors use the MSN Money Stock Research Wizard to help determine if a stock or mutual fund is the right investment for them. Because MSN Money tailored the wizard to new investors, the application contains detailed explanations, not only about the stock the investor inquired about, but about the questions the investor should be asking.

Even if the application functions properly, it will fail the user if they don't understand the information it's trying to tell them. The investor needs to both use and comprehend the wizard for it to succeed.

Web-based applications often help people by doing things outside their expertise. They turn to the application to help guide them through a decision making process they couldn't do on their own. Yet, if they make the wrong decision, it negatively affects their experience and their relationship with the organization.

#4: Interactivity

One of the big differences between a web application and other types of web pages is the user is far more interactive. On a content-rich site, users mostly click links and occasionally search. Yet, in a web application, they enter data, sort it, rearrange it, and move back and forth through the screens.

Understanding how the user will manage their time becomes critical. Does the team put all the data entry on one long screen? Do they break it up across multiple screens? What is the logical order to enter the data?

Users don't always follow the "happy path." They enter data incorrectly. They decide they need to go back and change something they've already entered. They discover they need to learn more about what the application is asking of them and, thereby need more detailed assistance.

Something as simple as always providing a mechanism to “undo” what’s already been done can create interesting usability dynamics. Handling how the application deals with browser controls, such as the back button, can make the designer’s life more challenging.

#5: Change Management

The designers at Facebook learned the hard way that quick changes to the application, even if the team thinks it’s an improvement, can have serious negative results if done incorrectly. We all know that users are resistant to change, yet designing how the change will happen is often overlooked, to serious detriment of the user experience.

While users are resistant to change, they are willing to do it when given enough support and structure. The problem with quick changes often happens when users frequently use an application and the old design conditioned them to things being a certain way. Even when the change is to their advantage, they often need warning and support to go from the old to the new.

We’re now seeing teams start to design the change process along with designing the changes themselves. Paying attention to how users make the transition can increase a change’s adoption and build long-term user loyalty.

Knowing What to Look For

At the highest level, building a usable web-based application isn’t any different from any other type of design: You place design ideas in front of users, look for where the idea doesn’t achieve the objective you’ve set out, and iterate until you get the results you’re seeking.

However, in design, the devil is always in the details. The above five usability challenges make web apps different from other types of design. Our research shows designers who are on the lookout and accommodate for them are more likely to create winning applications that delight users. •

Spot Reduction is Impossible - The Myth About Losing Fat

Spot reduction refers to the supposed ability of losing fat from one specific area of the body. Thanks to the tons of useless [ab workouts](#), exercises and fancy abdominal machines that currently exist, spot reduction is typically mentioned most of the time in reference to losing fat from the stomach. People think that if they do a certain exercise for a certain body part, they can directly target the fat on that body part.

Guess what... you can't! It's impossible!

Spot reduction is nothing more than a myth. Actually, aside from being a myth, it also happens to be a way to trick uninformed people into buying useless crap (usually in the form of [abdominal machines](#)) because they think losing fat from the specific area of their choosing (in this case, the stomach) is actually possible. It's not.

You can't decide where on your body you will lose fat from. Spot reduction implies that you can. Reducing fat from a specific spot just can't happen. A person with the goal of losing fat can only lose it from the body as a whole. There is no way to change that no matter what any stupid abdominal product or exercise machine claims. They are just flat out lying.

Don't misunderstand me here... the myth of spot reduction only applies to losing fat, not building muscle. You CAN certainly target specific muscles. What you CAN'T do is target specific fat. Exercises build and strengthen the muscle of a body part. They do nothing directly to the fat on that body part. It's impossible!

[Abdominal exercises](#) will NOT get rid of fat on your stomach. [Leg exercises](#) will not get rid of the fat on your legs. [Back exercises](#)

will not get rid of the fat on your back. [Bicep exercises](#) will not get rid of the fat on your arms. I'm too lazy to type it all, but this holds true for every single muscle group and body part. Exercises will take care of building muscle and strength, [diet](#) and cardio takes care of losing fat.

I know a lot of people wish spot reduction was actually possible. I also know a lot of people still think it is. I've watched the same people do the same ab exercises in my gym for years because they truly believe it's helping them with losing fat from their stomach. You'd think they'd catch on when their waist size doesn't ever change. That just goes to show you how big of a myth spot reduction is.

So... be sure to tell your friends. When it comes to losing fat, nothing you do will change what spot that fat reduces from.

Contact CFUS (corporate)

The CFUS Corporation * 4859 West Slauson Ave. Suite 219 * Los Angeles, California 90056
323.298.8502—office * 310.388.5988—fax * info@cfus.com * http://www.cfus.com

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